



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Severe Dry Spring Means Using Less Water

(Santa Rosa, CA) — Projections of low water levels in Lake Mendocino spurred the Sonoma County Water Agency today to call for voluntary water-saving measures similar to last summer from its contractors, including the cities of Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Sonoma, and Cotati; the Town of Windsor; North Marin Water District, Valley of the Moon Water District and the Marin Municipal Water District. The Agency is also seeking reduced water use from municipalities, businesses and agricultural communities in Mendocino and Sonoma counties that rely on the Russian River for water. The call comes after receiving historically low rainfall this spring and continued reductions in diversion from the Potter Valley Project.

“The dry weather, coupled with reductions in diversions from the Potter Valley Project, means we are experiencing a water supply situation very similar to last year,” said Deputy Chief Engineer of Operations Pam Jeane. “Using less water means more water in the Russian River, Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma. We rely on these sources for drinking water, wildlife habitat and recreational activities.”

The Agency’s goal is to save 12,000-15,000 acre-feet in Lake Mendocino by the end of October, 2008. Water supply projections show water levels in Lake Mendocino falling to about 20,000 acre-feet by early fall, a time when the Agency would like to see at least 30,000 acre-feet in Lake Mendocino to release into the upper Russian River for three species listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act: steelhead, Chinook salmon, and coho salmon.

“Due to the low level of water released in the upper Russian River, migration and spawning of Chinook salmon will be carefully monitored to avoid any negative impacts,” said David Manning, senior environmental specialist/fisheries biologist.

To date, the total combined storage in both Lake Pillsbury and Lake Mendocino is approximately 130,000 acre-feet. The water year type is already set as normal through the end of the year according to the provisions of the Agency’s water right permits. In a normal water year, the minimum flow in the lower Russian River (Dry Creek to Pacific Ocean) is 125 cubic feet-per-second. On May 31, the Agency will make a determination regarding a dry spring classification. At this time, the Agency believes this determination may result in a classification that sets the minimum flow in the upper Russian River (East Fork to Dry Creek) at 75 cubic feet-per-second. This dry spring classification does not change the minimum flow requirement in the lower Russian River.

The Agency will work closely with its contractors through established regional conservation programs to provide information and support. Agency contractors have numerous conservation programs in place and will be fully implementing additional resources to meet requested voluntary conservation.

“The need to conserve was not a surprise. It is an extremely dry spring, yet there is more water in Lake Mendocino than this time last year. At this point we are hopeful to not see any mandatory water restrictions enacted, and we have asked customers to voluntarily conserve and use no more water than last year,” said Chris DeGabriele, general manager of the North Marin Water District. “We are using local sources of supply, Stafford Lake and recycled water in Novato, where we have invested in new treatment plants to ensure their reliability in summer months.”

Last year, residents and businesses reduced water use and diversions from the Russian River by over 20 percent under an order from the State Water Resources Control Board. The Agency does not plan to seek State intervention this year.

“We are confident that our community will respond proactively like they did last year,” said Jeane. “We have launched a new campaign, called Less Is More, to educate everyone about our top 10 tips to use less water.”

The Less Is More campaign, coordinated with the Agency’s contractors, includes public education advertisements in movie theaters, newspapers, on the radio and television, and on bus panels. View the ads and the Agency’s top 10 tips to use less water at www.sonomacountywater.org.

The Agency will host three public meetings to educate the public about Lake Mendocino water supply projections, water conservation and impacts to cities, water agencies, residents, businesses and agricultural communities in Mendocino and Sonoma counties. Agency staff will provide a brief presentation and public participation is welcome.

Meeting locations, dates and times:

Ukiah

Date: June 2, 2008

Time: 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Location: Ukiah City Hall, 300 Seminary Avenue, Ukiah, CA

Guerneville

Date: June 9, 2008

Time: 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Location: Guerneville Veterans Memorial Hall, First and Church Streets, Guerneville, CA

Healdsburg

Date: June 12, 2008

Time: 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Location: Healdsburg City Hall, 401 Grove Street, Healdsburg, CA

The Facts:

Dry Spring: Our region has faced the driest three months of spring on record. This March, April and May, Santa Rosa's rainfall was .65 of an inch. Next driest was 2004, when 1.91 inches of rain fell during the three-month period.

Potter Valley Project Flow Reductions: Water flows into Lake Mendocino from the Potter Valley Project have been reduced by 33 percent. The Potter Valley Project diverts Eel River water through a Mendocino County powerhouse owned and operated by PG&E into the upper Russian River Basin, and is the source of most of the summer flow in the East Branch Russian River. In 2004, federal regulatory agencies ordered a new water flow regime for the Potter Valley Project. This new regime changed the minimum and maximum stream flow requirements for the East Branch Russian River. The East Branch Russian River feeds into Lake Mendocino.

About Lake Mendocino:

Lake Mendocino is located three miles northeast of the City of Ukiah and is the major feature of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Coyote Valley Dam Project. Lake Mendocino is impounded by Coyote Valley Dam, located on the East Fork of the Russian River, 0.8 mile upstream of the East Fork Russian River's confluence with the Russian River. Coyote Valley Dam is a rolled earth embankment. Lake Mendocino began storing water in 1959.

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Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us on the Web at www.sonomacountywater.org.